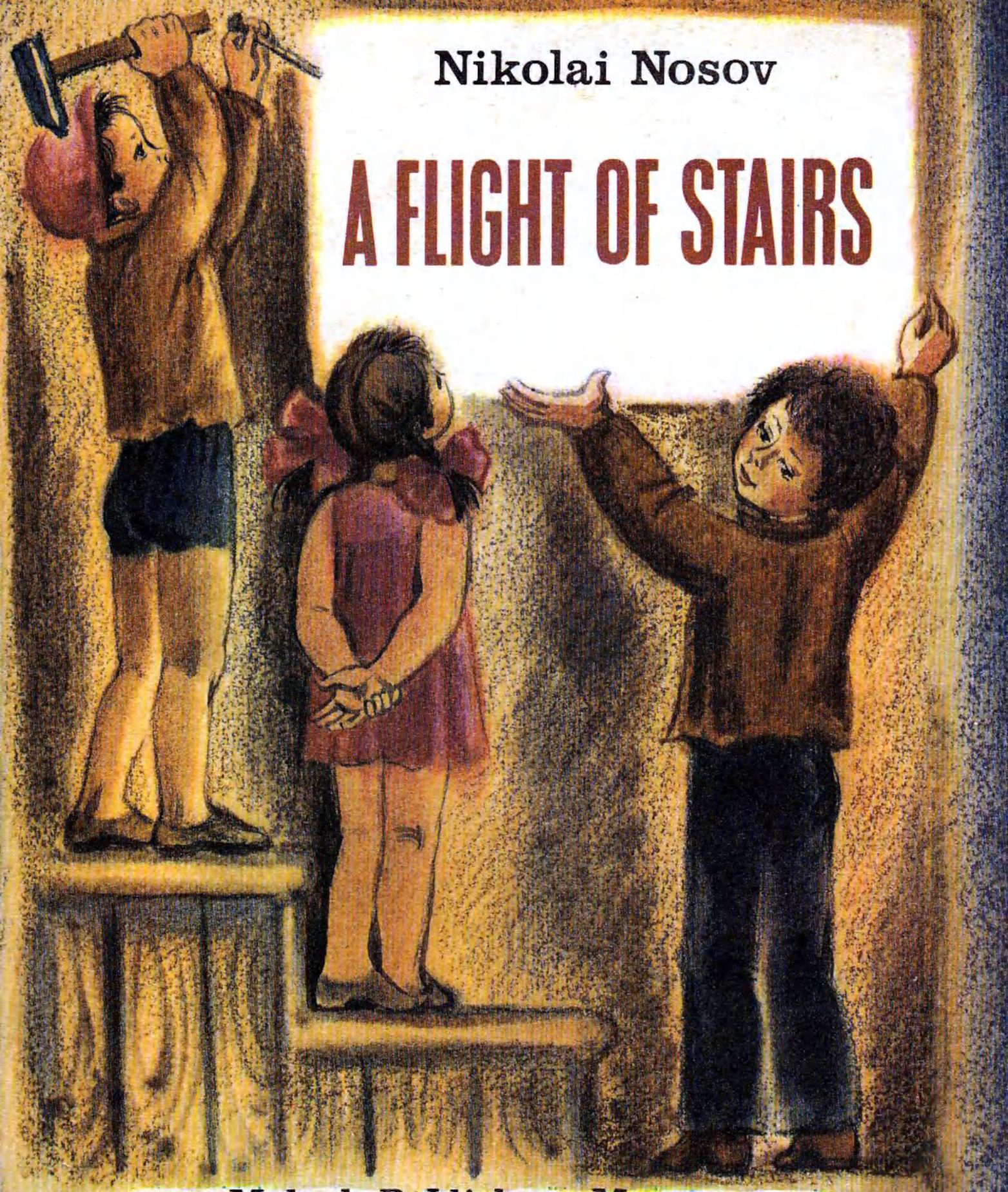
Nikolai Nosov

A FLIGHT OF STAIRS



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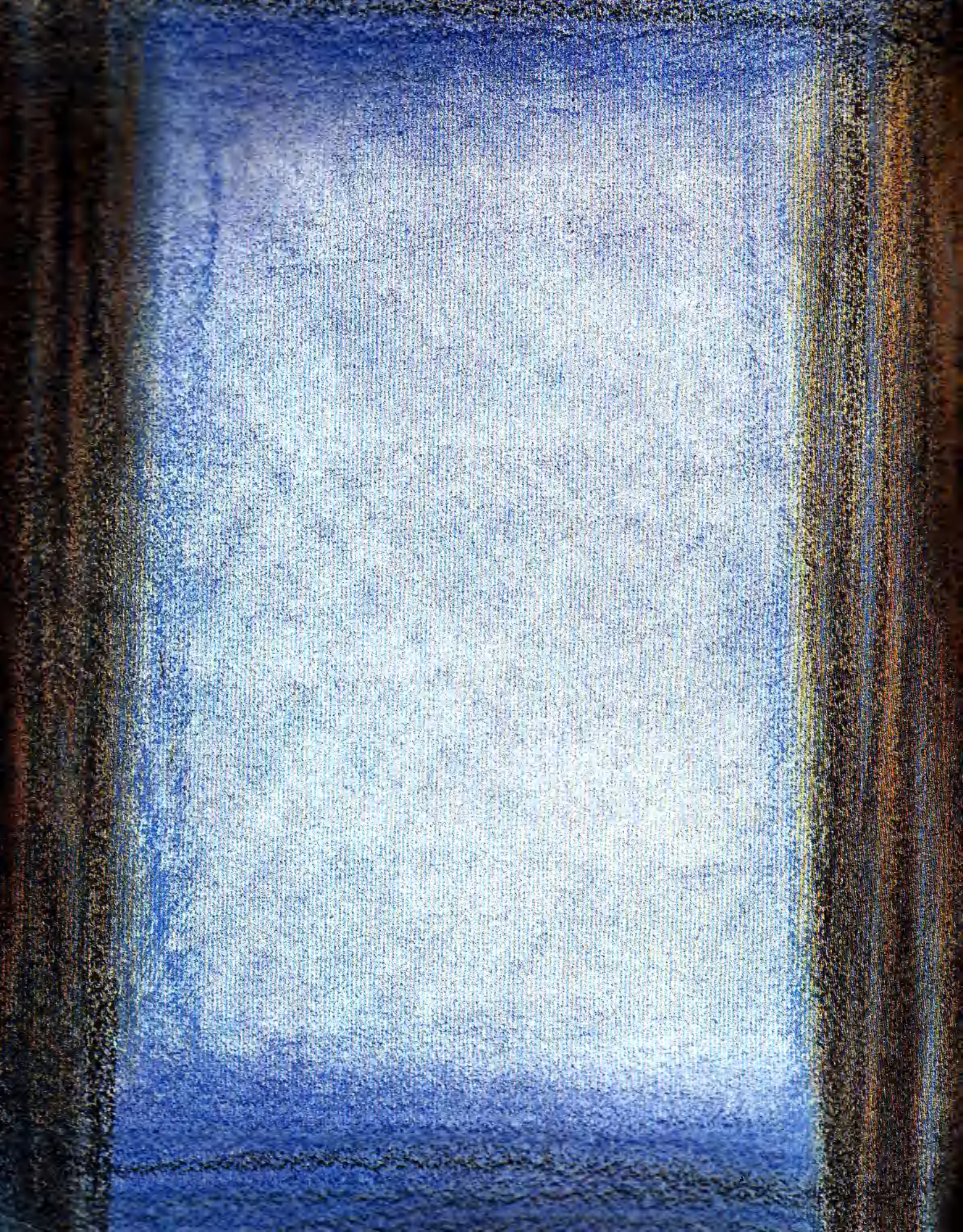
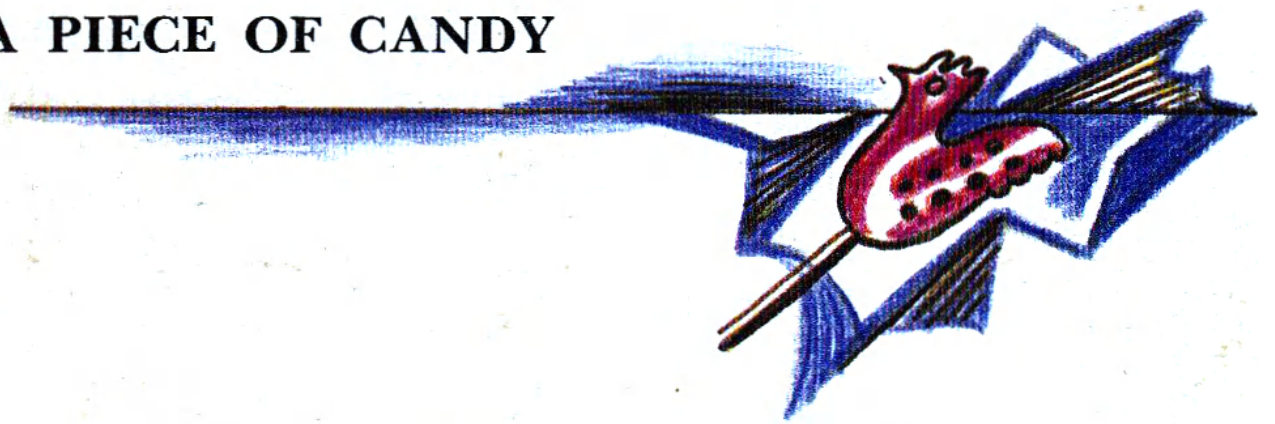


A PIECE OF CANDY



As Mother was leaving, she said to Misha, "I'll be back soon. Be a good boy. Don't get into mischief, and don't go poking around. I'll give you a nice red sourball when I get back."

After she left, Misha behaved very nicely for a while. He didn't get into mischief and he didn't go poking around. Then he just moved a chair over to the cupboard, climbed up on it, opened the cupboard door and looked at the shelves.

"I'm just looking. I'm not touching anything," he said.

The sugar bowl was staring at him. He took it down and set it on the table.

"I'll just have a look inside. I won't touch anything," he said and lifted the lid. There was something red on top of the sugar.

"A sourball! I bet it's the one Mother said she'd give me when she got back."

He stuck his hand into the sugar bowl and fished it out.

"It sure is nice and big. I bet it's really sweet."

Misha licked it. "I'll just suck it a while, and then I'll put it back," he said.

So he sucked it for a while and then took it out of his mouth to see how much was left. Then he sucked it some

more. It didn't look like it was getting much smaller, but all of a sudden there was only a tiny ball left. It was no bigger than a pea. That's when he decided it was time to put it back into the sugar bowl. He licked his sticky fingers, gazed at the sourball and said, "I might as well have all of it. Mother'll give it to me anyway when she gets back, because I'm behaving nicely, and I'm not getting into mischief or anything."

After he fished the remains of the candy out of the sugar bowl, he thought he should put the bowl back on the shelf, so he picked it up. But his fingers were so sticky that he dropped it. It split in two. Lumps of sugar scattered all over the floor.

Misha was frightened. "What'll Mother say when she gets back?"

He picked up the two halves of the bowl and leaned them against each other. The sugar bowl looked whole again. Then he picked up the lumps of sugar, put them back into the sugar bowl again, placed the lid on it and carefully set the bowl back on the shelf.

His mother returned soon after. "Well, were you a good boy, Misha?" she said.

"Yes."

"I'm so glad. Here's your reward." At this she opened the cupboard door, picked up the sugar bowl and—yes, indeed—it split in two,and the lumps of sugar scattered all over the floor.

"What's this? Who broke the sugar bowl?" she said.

"Not me. It just fell apart."

"Oh, it did? And where's the sourball?"

"Uh... It— I mean— I ate it. I was behaving nicely, so I ate it."

FULL OF FUN

Valya and I are always full of fun. We love to make up new games.

One day after Mommy read us "The Three Little Pigs", we skipped around the room, singing: "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?"

When Mommy went shopping, Valya said,

"Let's make a house, Petya. Like the little pigs' house."

We pulled a blanket off one of the beds and draped it over the table. It was just like a real house. We crawled into it and saw that it was very dark inside.

"This is our house now," Valya said. "We'll always live here and we won't let anyone in, and if the big bad wolf comes along, we'll chase it away."

"Too bad we don't have any windows, though. It's awfully dark," I said.

"So what? Real pigs' houses don't have any windows, either."

"Can you see me?" I said.

"No. Can you see me?"

"I can't see you, either. I can't even see myself."

All of a sudden, somebody touched my ankle. I screamed and scrambled out of our house under the table. Valya was right behind me.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"Somebody touched my ankle. What if it was the big bad wolf?"

Valya got so scared she dashed out of the room. This time I was right behind her. Once out in the hall, we slammed the door shut and leaned against it, so that the big bad wolf wouldn't push it open.

After a while, Valya said, "What if there's nobody there?"

"Who touched my ankle, then?"

"Me," said Valya. "I wanted to see where you were."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I got scared. You scared me."

We opened the door. There was nobody in the room. Still, we were afraid to go over to the table. What if the big bad wolf suddenly leaped out from under the blanket?

"Pull the blanket off the table," I said to Valya.

"But there's nobody underneath it."

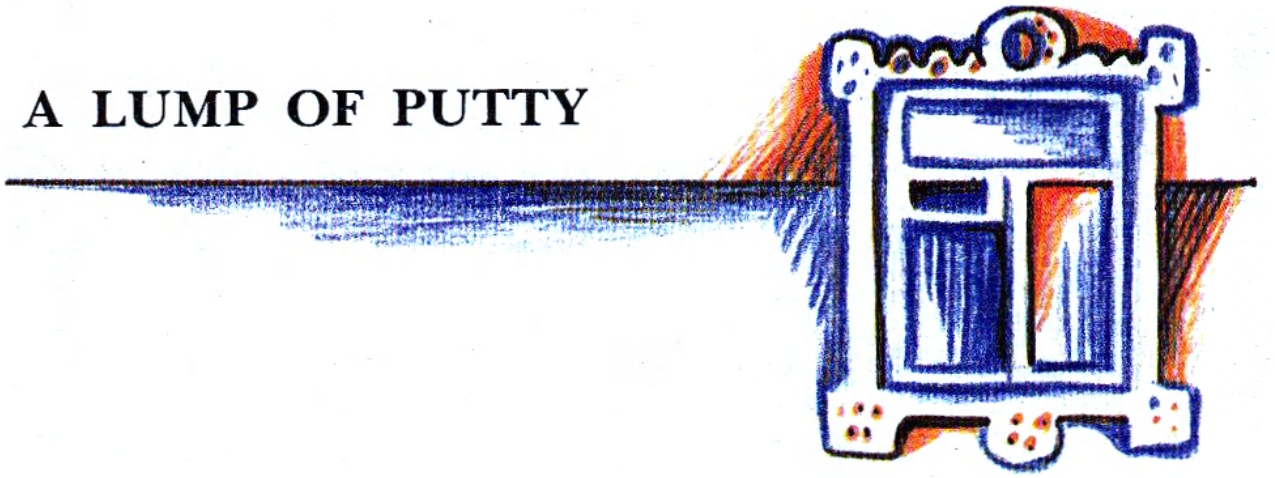
"What if there is?"

I tiptoed over, grabbed a corner of the blanket, yanked it and raced for the door. The blanket slid to the floor. There was nobody under the table. What a relief! Just as we were going to fix our table-house, Valya said,

"But what if somebody grabs your ankle again?"

So we decided not to play The Three Little Pigs after all.

A LUMP OF PUTTY



One autumn day the glazier was putting putty on the window frames. Shurik and Kostya stood watching him. As soon as he left they picked off the soft putty and used it as modelling clay, but the animals they made weren't very good.

"Look at my snake, Shurik," Kostya said.

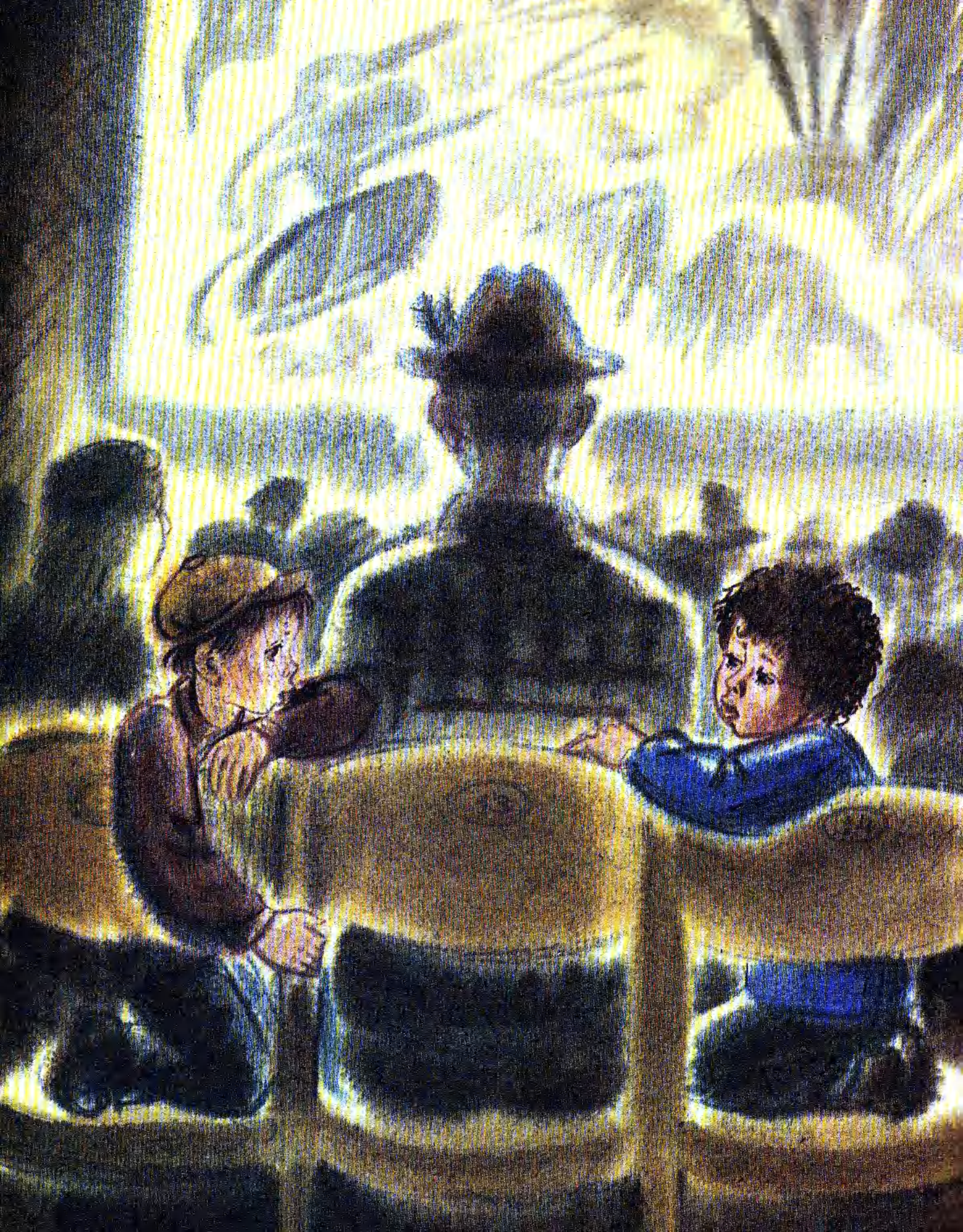
"It looks like liverwurst."

Kostya got mad, rolled the snake into a lump and stuck the putty into his pocket. Then the boys decided to go to the movies. On the way they bought two buns.

"Where's the putty?" Shurik said.

"Relax. It's right here in my pocket."

There was a crowd going in, and Kostya and Shurik got separated. Kostya found a row with three empty seats and sat down. He put the lump of putty on the empty seat next to his own. Just then a man made his way down the row. He sat down on the putty.



"I'm holding this seat for Shurik," Kostya said.

"What Shurik? This is my seat now," the man said.

Just then Shurik waved to him. He took the last seat, the one next to the man who was sitting next to Kostya. "Where's the putty?" he whispered.

"Shh!" Kostya hissed and glanced at the man sitting between them.

"Who's he?" Shurik said.

"I don't know."

"Why're you scared of him?"

"He's sitting on the putty."

"Why'd you give it to him?"

"I didn't. He just sat on it."

"Get it back."

Just then the lights dimmed and the movie began.

"Give us back our putty, please," Kostya said to the man.

"What putty?"

"The putty we scraped off the window."

"The window?"

"Yes. Give it back, please."

"I didn't take it."

"I know. But you're sitting on it."

"What?"

"You're sitting on it."

The man jumped up. "Why'd you wait till now to tell me, you scoundrel?"

"But I said I was holding the seat for my friend."

"When'd you say it? After I sat down, that's when!"

"I didn't know you'd sit on it."

The man ran his hand over the seat. "Where's the putty?"

"Here!" Kostya said. It's smeared all over the seat. We'll scrape it off."

"Hurry up!" the man muttered.

"Hey, sit down!" the people in back shouted.

"I can't. There's putty on my seat," the man said.

The boys finally wiped the seat clean. "Okay," Kostya said.

The man sat down.

Kostya had just settled back to watch the screen when Shurik whispered,

"Did you have your bun yet?"

"No. Did you?"

"Me neither. Let's."

"Okay."

There was a loud munching sound. Then Kostya spat something out and croaked,

"Mine's awful. How's yours?"

"Fine."

"Mine must have melted while it was in my pocket."

"Where's the putty?"

"In my pocket. Hey! This is my bun. *Aagh!* I took a bite of the putty. I thought it was my bun. No wonder it tasted awful."

Kostya was so mad he flung the putty under his seat.

"Why'd you do that?" Shurik said.

"I don't need it any more."

"But I do," Shurik muttered and slid off his seat to look for it. "I can't see anything. It's too dark."

"I know where it is," Kostya said and slid off his seat.

"Help!" Kostya cried. "Let go!"

"Who's this?"

"Me, Shurik."

"Let go of me."

"I'm not holding you."

"You stepped on my hand."

"What're you doing down here?"

"Looking for the putty."

Kostya slithered through the legs of his chair and bumped into Shurik. "Who's this?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's me. Shurik."

"This is me."

"Did you find it?"

"No."

"Neither did I."

"Let's watch the movie. We're just scaring people and bumping against their legs. They think we're a dog or something."

The boys crawled back under their chairs and sat down again.

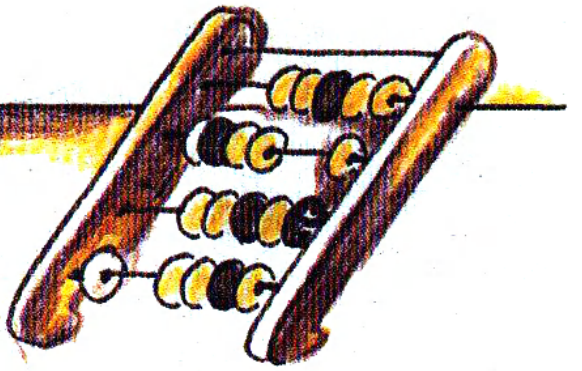
Just then the word "END" flashed on the screen.

Everybody stood up and headed for the exits.

When they were out on the street, Kostya said, "What was the movie about? I can't figure it out."

"You think I can? Boy, the junk they pass off for movies! You don't even know what they're about after you've seen them!" Shurik said.

A FLIGHT OF STAIRS



The day Petya learned to count to ten in kindergarten his little sister Valya was waiting for him by the gate when he got home.

"I can count to ten!" Petya shouted. "Watch me count the steps."

They started up the stairs, with Petya counting loudly,

"One, two, three, four, five—"

"Why'd you stop?" Valya wanted to know.

"Wait. I forgot what comes next. Don't talk to me. I'm thinking."

"All right, I won't talk to you."

They stood there in silence for a while. Finally, Petya said,

"I can't remember it this way. Let's go down, so I can start all over."

So they turned around and went down the steps, then turned around and started up again. Petya began counting again,

"One, two, three, four, five—"

And he stopped again.

"Did you forget it again?" Valya said.

"Yes, but how come? I just knew it, and then all of a sudden I forgot what comes next. Let's start all over."

So they went down and started up again. Petya began counting,

"One, two, three, four, five—"

"I know! Twenty-five!" Valya prompted.

"No! You're just getting me all mixed up. I can't think when you're talking. See? Now I've forgotten what comes next, and all on account of you. Now I have to start all over."

"I don't want to start all over," Valya said. "We just keep going up and down, and don't ever get to the top."

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Petya said, "but I'm going to keep starting all over till I remember what comes next."

So Valya went into the house and said to their mother, "Petya's out there counting the steps. He keeps saying one-two-three-four-five, and then he stops, because he doesn't know what comes next."

"Six comes after five," their mother said.

Valya ran out onto the porch. There was Petya, starting up the steps again.

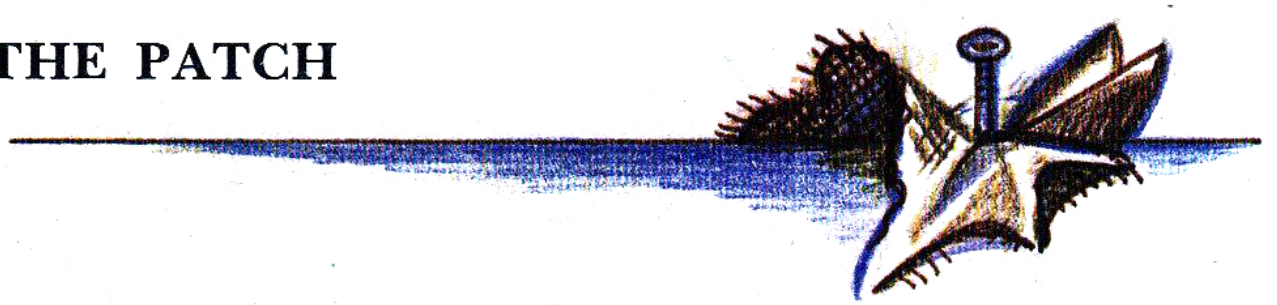
"One, two, three, four, five—"

"Six!" Valya prompted. "Six!"

"Six!" Petya shouted and came up all the rest of the way, counting each step. "Six, seven, eight, nine, ten."

It's a good thing there were only ten steps, or he'd still be there, because he didn't know what came after ten yet.

THE PATCH



Bob had a pair of khaki-green pants. He was very proud of them and said they were real army pants.

Well, all the boys envied him, because none of them had a pair of real army pants.

As Bob was busy climbing a fence one day, he got caught on a nail and ripped his wonderful pants. He was so upset he could have cried. Instead, he hurried home to his mother. She was the one person who could mend them beautifully.

"How many times have I told you not to climb fences?" his mother scolded. "I can't spend my life mending your clothes."

"I won't ever again. Honest. Please fix them."

"You fix them."

"I don't know how to."

"You know how to rip them. Now you'll learn how to mend them."

"Then I'll wear them with a hole," Bob grumbled and went outside to play.

When the other boys saw his torn pants they laughed.

"Those aren't army pants. Not with a piece missing, they aren't," one of the boys said.

"I asked my mommy to fix them, but she wouldn't," Bob said.

"Did you ever see a soldier who went home to his mommy when he tore his pants?" another boy said. "A soldier knows how to do everything: he can sew on a patch, or a button all by himself."

Bob was ashamed of himself.

He went back home and asked his mother for a needle and thread and a swatch of green cloth. He cut out a patch the size of his hand and began sewing it on over the hole.

It was hard work. Besides, he was in a hurry and kept pricking his finger.

"Quit pricking me!" he said to the needle. He tried to hold it by the very tip and keep his other fingers out of the way.

At last the patch was sewn on over the hole. It bulged like a crumpled piece of cardboard, and the trouser leg it was sewn to was all gathered and shorter than the other.

"Golly, this is even worse than it was without the patch," Bob said as he stared at his handiwork. "I'll have to do it over."

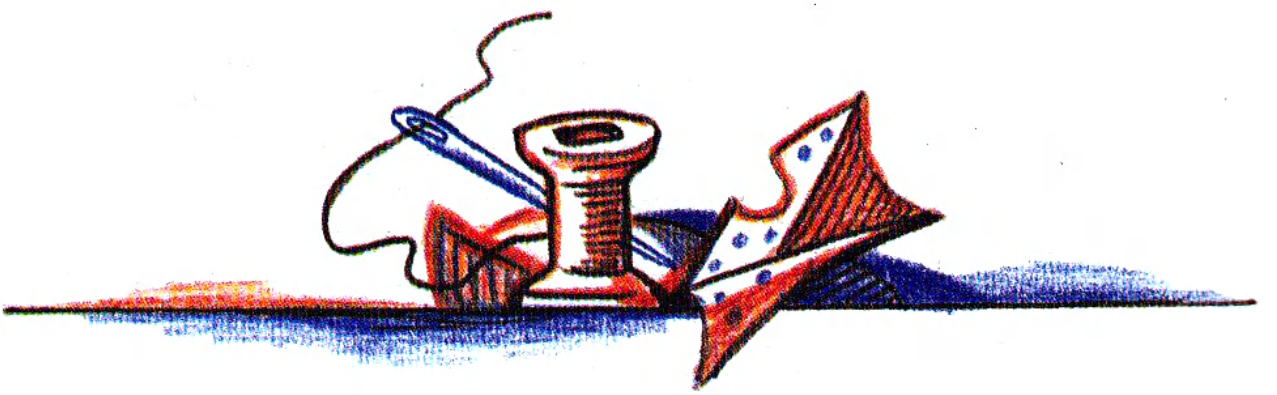
He snipped off the patch, smoothed it out and laid it over the hole. Then he traced the outline with a pencil and began sewing it on again. He tried not to hurry this time, and to keep the patch in place.

It took him twice as long to sew the patch on as it had the first time, but when he was done it was a fine job. The cloth wasn't gathered around the edges, and the patch was on so tight you couldn't rip it off.

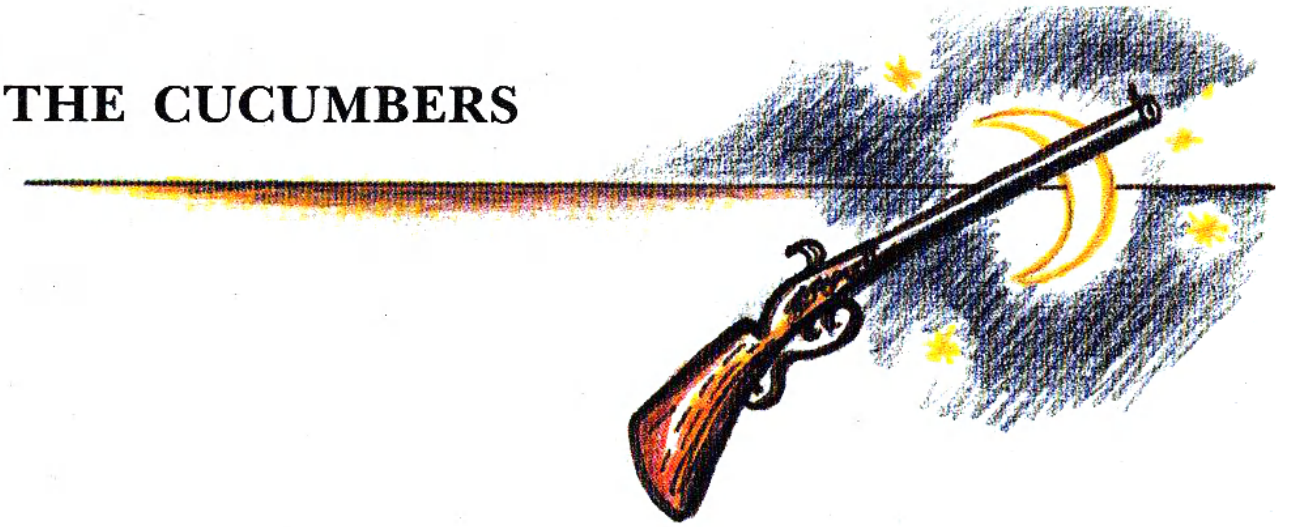
Bob put his pants on and went out to play.

"Hey, look how good you did it," his friend said. "I know you did it all by yourself, because I can see where you traced the line all around it."

Bob held his leg up so that everyone else could see and said, "Too bad I don't know how to sew on buttons yet. I didn't lose any yet. But as soon as I do, I'll sew it back on all by myself, too."



THE CUCUMBERS



One day Pavlik took his friend Kolya fishing. They had no luck at all, not a single bite all day. But when they started back home, they turned in at the collective farm's vegetable garden and filled their pockets with cucumbers. The watchman spotted them and blew his whistle, but they ran as fast as they could and escaped. As they walked along, Pavlik got to thinking that he'd be in trouble for stealing cucumbers when he got home and so he gave his to Kolya.

"Look at the cucumbers I brought you!" Kolya shouted as he opened the front door.

His mother looked up and saw that his pockets and shirt were bulging and that he was holding two cucumbers that were too big to fit anywhere.

"Where'd you get them?" she asked.

"In the garden."

"Which garden?"

"The big one near the river. The farm garden."

"Who said you could pick cucumbers there?"

"Nobody. I just did."

"You mean you stole them?"

"No. I just took them. Pavlik took some. So I did, too." He began pulling them out of his pockets.

"Wait! Don't," his mother said.

"Why not?"

"You take them right back."

"What for? They were growing on the vines, and I picked them. They won't grow any more now anyway."

"No matter. You take them back and lay them out on the row you picked them from."

"Okay, I'll throw them out."

"Oh no, you won't! You didn't plant them. You didn't water them. And so you've no right to throw them out."

"But the watchman's there. He blew his whistle at us, and we ran away."

"And what if he had caught you?"

"He couldn't. He's old, and he can't run fast."

"Shame on you. He's responsible for the cucumbers. If anyone finds out they're missing, they'll say it's his fault."

Kolya's mother stuffed the cucumbers back into his pockets.

"I won't go!" he cried. "He has a shotgun. He'll shoot me dead!"

"It's just what you deserve. I don't want my son to be a thief."

"Come with me, Mommy! I'm scared to go back by myself."

"You weren't scared when you stole them, were you?" she said, placed the two biggest cucumbers into his hands and sent him out of the house.

"Go on, take them back," she said.

Kolya trudged off down the village street.

"I'll throw them into this ditch and say I took them back," he said to himself and looked around. "No, I'd better really

take them back before somebody sees me throwing them out and the watchman gets into trouble."

As he walked down the street, he kept mumbling to himself, "Pavlik didn't get into trouble like me. He gave me his cucumbers, and now he's home, and nobody's mad at him."

Kolya came to the end of the village street and headed across the field. He'd never been out this late by himself, and it made him feel uneasy. At last he reached the cucumber patch by the river. There was a little hut at the edge of the cucumber rows. That's where the watchman was. Kolya stood outside the hut and sniffled. The watchman heard him.

"What's the matter?" he said, coming out.

"I brought back the cucumbers."

"What cucumbers?"

"The ones Pavlik and I picked. Mommy said I had to bring them back."

"I see." The old watchman sounded very surprised. "So you were the boys I blew my whistle at. I didn't know you'd gotten away with any. That wasn't nice of you at all."

"Pavlik took some, so I took some, too. And then he gave me all of his cucumbers."

"Never mind Pavlik. You're old enough to know better. Don't you ever let me catch you doing that again. Give them to me, and you run along home."

Kolya pulled the cucumbers out of his pockets and shirt and laid them on one of the rows.

"Is that all?" the watchman said.

"No. There was one more."

"Well? Where is it?"

"I ate it. What'll you do to me?"

"Nothing. What's the use if you've already eaten it?"

"Will it get you in trouble?"

"One missing cucumber won't matter, but if you hadn't brought all these back, I certainly would have been in trouble."

Kolya turned and ran off. All of a sudden he stopped and shouted, "I forgot to ask you something!"

"Yes?"

"What about the one I ate? Did I steal it, or what?"

"Hm," said the watchman. "That's a pretty hard question. Well, let's say you didn't steal it."

"But what did I do, then?"

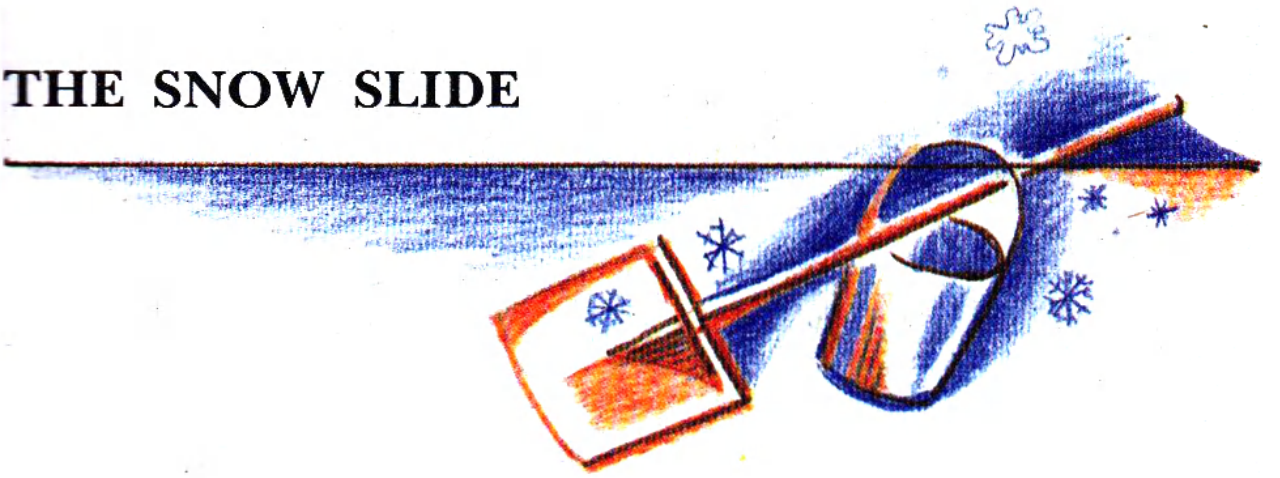
"Let's say it was a present from me."

"Thanks! I'm going home now. So long."

"So long."

Kolya raced across the field and over the little bridge. When he reached the village street he stopped and then walked the rest of the way home slowly. He was feeling very good inside.

THE SNOW SLIDE



The children worked hard all morning. They were making a snow slide. They shovelled snow from all over the yard into a big pile near the shed. Finally, when it was nice and high, they brought out buckets of cold water and poured it over the snow. Then they all went home for lunch.

"It'll freeze hard while we're having lunch, and then we can go sledding on it," one of the children said.

Vova, who lived in apartment 6, was a shrewd boy. He didn't help make the snow slide. He just stood by his window, watching the other children work. When they called to him to come out and help, he only shook his head and shrugged, as if to say he wasn't allowed to go out.

Now as soon as all the children had gone off to have lunch, he put on his snowsuit and ice skates and hurried out. Zip! went his skates on the snow. Zip! Why, he didn't even know how to skate properly!

"Hey! This is great," he said when he finally reached the snow slide. "I'll skate down it." He tried climbing up the slope, but skidded and fell on his face. "Oh! It's awfully slippery."

He got up shakily, but tumbled again. He must have slipped and skidded and fallen a dozen times.

"How can I get to the top?" he wondered. He thought hard for a while and finally had an idea. "I'll sprinkle sand on the slide, and then I'll climb to the top," he said.

So Vova took one of the plywood snow shovels and ducked into the shed. There was a box of sand there. Soon he was very busy scooping up sand, carrying it out and sprinkling it on the snow slide. He'd sprinkle some in front of himself and climb a little higher, and he kept doing that until at last he reached the top of the slide.

"Now I can skate down," he said.

He shoved off and...tumbled again. After all, the blades of his skates couldn't slide on sand. As he lay there on his belly, he said to himself,

"How can I skate on sand?" And then he crawled the rest of the way down.

Just then the other children started coming out after lunch. They looked at the slide and saw sand sprinkled all over it.

"Who spoiled our snow slide?"

"Who put sand on the slide?"

"Did you see anybody here, Vova?"

They were all talking at once.

"No," said Vova. "I didn't see anybody here. I sprinkled sand on it, because it was so slippery I couldn't climb to the top."

"Don't you have any brains?"

"How'd you get such a bright idea? We worked hard to make a slide, and now you've gone and spoiled it. Now nobody can go sledding on it!"

"When it snows again, the new snow will cover the sand, and then it'll be all right again," Vova said.

"It may not snow till next week. We want to go sledding right now."

"I don't know what to do," Vova said.

"Oh, you don't? But you knew how to spoil it, didn't you? Go get the snow shovel!"

Vova took off his skates and picked up the shovel.

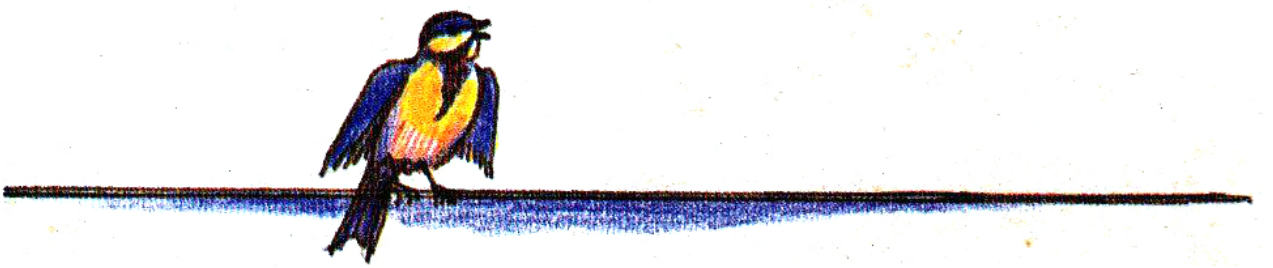
"Now start shovelling snow on top of the sand."

Vova piled a lot of fresh snow on the slide. The other children brought out some more water and poured it over the snow.

"There. Now as soon as it sets, we can go sledding."

Vova had so much fun shovelling snow that he went on working and made steps in the packed snow up the side of the slide.

"That's so's it'll be easy to climb up," he said. "We don't want anyone sprinkling sand on the slide any more."



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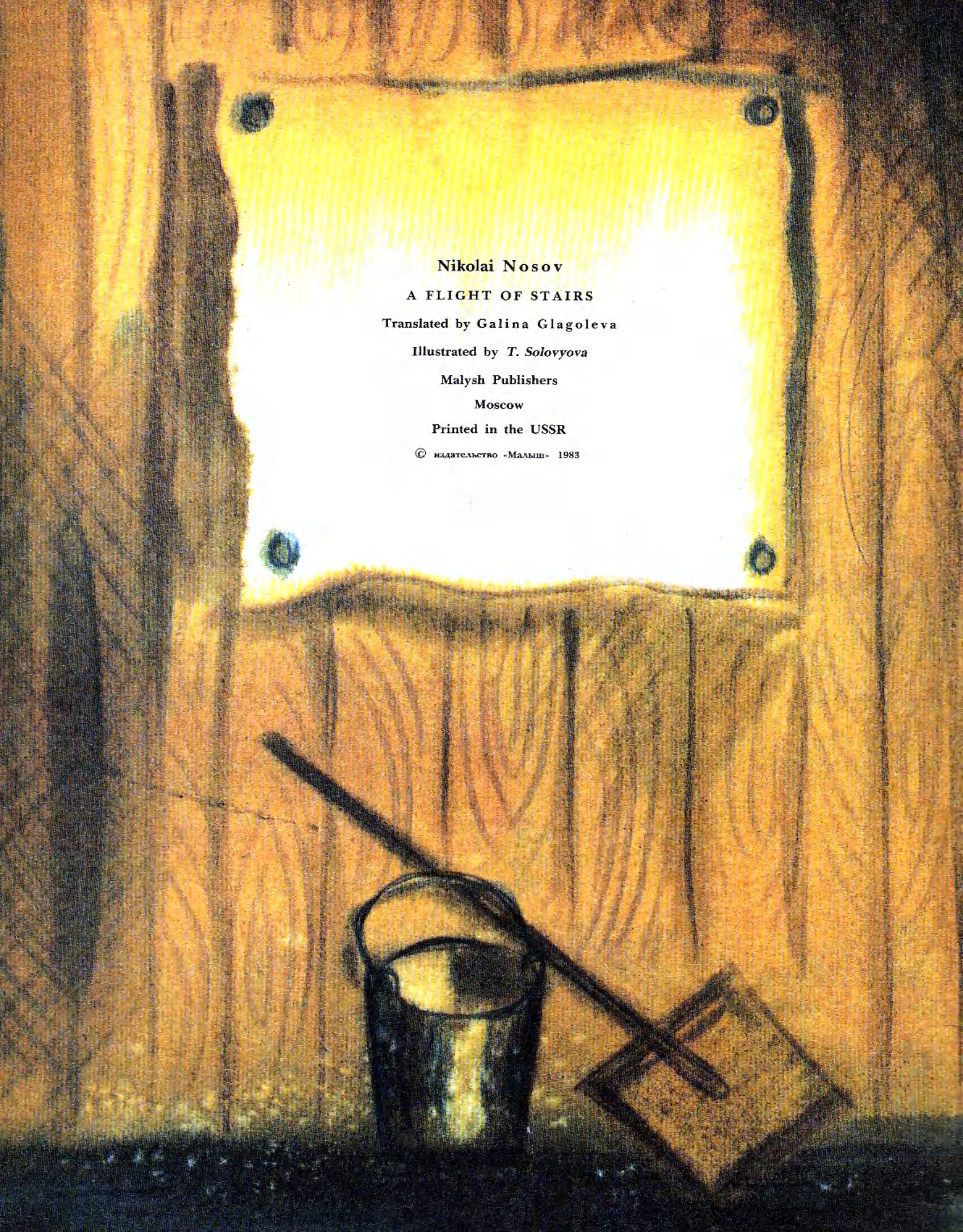

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